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REPRINT OF EXTRACTS

WRITTEN ON THE

GEORGIAN BAY CANAL PROJECT

—BY—

CAPTAIN C. F. WINTER,

(Of the Canadian Militia.)

Published in his Second Prize Essay on "The Protection of Commerce during War."

IN THE

Journal of the Royal United Service Institution.

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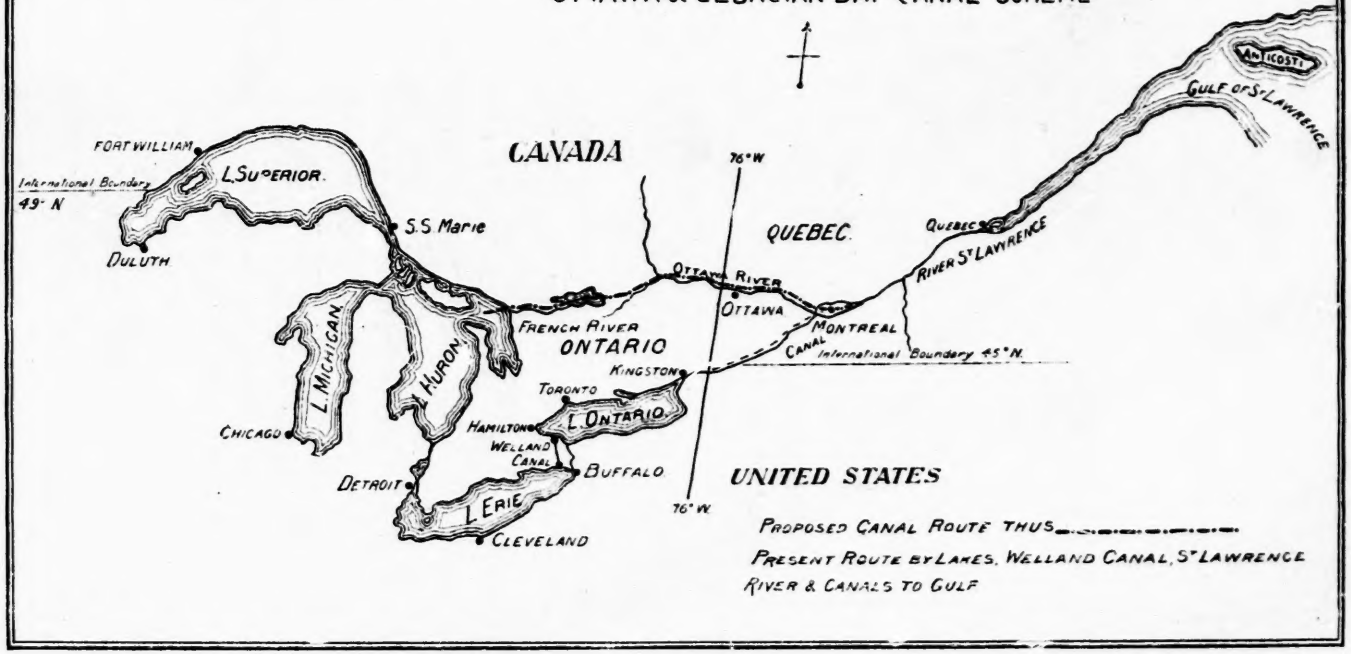
ROUGH MAP ILLUSTRATING IMPERIAL IMPORTANCE OF

OTTAWA & GEORGIAN BAY CANAL SCHEME



MONTREAL, OTTAWA AND GEORGIAN BAY CANAL

14.—Encourage and assist Canada to construct the Ottawa and Georgian Bay Ship Canal as an Imperial work.

In the event of war it is not only upon the salt seas that the protection of trade and commerce has to be considered—there are large inland seas of fresh water, nearly 2,000 miles from tide-water, within the territory of the Empire's leading Colony, and down which a large quantity of the raw food products of the United Kingdom (i.e., destined for consumption within the Kingdom) are floated to the sea. These food products are constantly expanding in volume, and it is a safe prediction that before many years the major portion of the imported food products of Britain will come from the prairies of Western Canada. These inland seas border upon the shores of an envious and jealous rival, who, although she acknowledges the United Kingdom as by long odds her best customer for her exported goods, spares no pains to show her enmity and dislike to British dominion upon the North American Continent. Of course, it may never go further than that, and all good Britishers will fervently hope and pray it may never do so; but the ways of diplomacy are devious, complications may force the United States into an alliance against us, and a

thousand and one things go to show that certain influential parties in the Republic would not be averse to her doing so. With all this as a fact it would be folly for us not to consider how our interests would be effected on these great inland seas were the United States in an unfortunate moment to take up arms against us. The outlet from the Great Lakes is by the St. Lawrence River to the gulf of the same name and North Atlantic Ocean, and is for most of the way entirely through Canadian territory. The small rough drawing (Map I) herewith shows the connections between the lakes and the situation of existing canals at points where such aids to navigation are found necessary, as well as the new route advocated for the Ottawa and Georgian Bay Ship Canal.

The present route from the Great Lakes to the sea is through Lake Huron and St. Clair by the Detroit River to Lake Erie, thence by Welland Canal (in Canadian territory, but within a few miles of the United States border throughout its entire course) into Lake Ontario, whence the Gulf of St. Lawrence is reached by the river of the same name, and its canals in that portion of the stream between Kingston and Montreal. For the successful defence and protection of Canada, military opinion strongly inclines to the opinion that the possession of the lakes and an uninterrupted line of communications by water are essential. In the event of war with the United States the very first thing to be done should be to place an adequate flotilla of small, swift, and heavily-armed gun-boats upon these upper lakes, both to prevent incursions upon our lake shipping and also to hold the

large and mostly defenceless cities of Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago, as hostages. This flotilla could not directly prevent invasion, but indirectly their presence would have a most deterrent effect upon the United States. At present the route to the lakes would, in case of war, be very precarious, and it is extremely doubtful if the Canadian Government could act sufficiently promptly to save and hold the Welland and Beauharnois Canals against the powerful attack that would undoubtedly be quickly made upon them by the United States forces. The United States authorities fully appreciate the importance of the Welland and what it means to them in the event of war. But while the odds seem against us, notwithstanding that the keys to the situation are on our ground, still, we have geographically, in reserve, one may say, another and much more superior route, which if completed, would place us beyond question in a position to control the lakes. This is the route by the Ottawa River from Montreal, via Mattawa River (a tributary of the Ottawa), Lake Nipissing, and the French River to the Georgian Bay. The route is wholly within our territory, most of it hundreds of miles back from the frontier, would not be difficult of construction for medium craft, requiring only some twenty-nine miles of actual canal, and, if completed, would permit of us concentrating our effort in time of war upon more likely projects than frittering away our strength along a line of canals difficult to defend and easy of access to the enemy. With a naval depot established on Lake Nipissing, the lakes at any time could be ours in twenty-four hours. This could be done without violating any

Treaty, as Lake Nipissing is entirely an inland water, and is not included in the Great Lakes mentioned in the Treaty of 1818, which provides for the armament which Great Britain and the United States shall maintain there. This is no radical or erratic scheme, nor is it a new one. As long ago as 1810-11, H.R.H. the Duke of Kent had favorably commented upon the value of such a work. The Great Duke of Wellington was also, if not exactly an advocate, a staunch friend of the proposition, as was General Sir John Michel, one of the ablest and most energetic Commanders of the Forces ever sent to Canada. At that time, however, settlement in the Canadas was scant and immigration set in along the St. Lawrence frontier and shores of the Great Lakes, rather than the back woods of the Ottawa and Lake Nipissing. Time has, however, changed all that. The Rideau Canal, built as an Imperial work, for communication with the Lakes, via the Ottawa and Lake Ontario, was then considered ample for the purpose--to-day it is comparatively useless. The great natural route, saving hundreds of miles and giving us the whip hand in the Great Lakes, is within our territory, with its hundreds of miles of good river and lake navigation, requiring simply to be supplemented by a comparatively small amount of canal building proper and river dredging, etc. At present a company is endeavoring to procure capital to commence this great work, and the benefits to be derived commercially are such that it is reported some English capitalists have already signified their willingness to provide funds, if the Government will assist. There is no question but that the Government of Canada will assist in this work,

but the ultimate results are bound to be of such Imperial import, that some assistance, such as was accorded in the building of the Rideau waterway, might be given by the Home Government. Canada may not have contributed much towards Imperial Defence in direct money votes, but it mut be admitted she has done much indirectly. In presenting the Empire with an alternate route to the Orient via the Canadian Pacific Railway, and now, if she undertakes this, in giving Great Britain what must be practically the control of the Great Lakes, she will have done much for defence and much for the protection of trade and commerce. This project is worthy of Admiralty recognition and support. More tonnage passed through the Sault Ste. Marie Canal last year than through the Suez, and it is expanding yearly. For the protection of trade and commerce it is felt that the new canal via the Ottawa and Georgian Bay is fast becoming a necessity.